

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
Department of Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Richard Spinrad
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

The Honorable Brenda Mallory
Chair
Council on Environmental Quality
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

June 22, 2022

Dear Secretary Haaland, Secretary Vilsack, Administrator Spinrad, and Chair Mallory:

As members of the House Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition (SEEC) Nature and Oceans Task Force, we are grateful for the work that you have taken to advance President Biden's Executive Order on *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*. As you continue to advance the *America, The Beautiful* initiative and the *American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas* (Atlas) tool to harness the power of nature to combat the climate crisis, we urge you to consider a comprehensive interagency natural climate solutions (NCS) assessment. This assessment would identify key biodiversity corridors and carbon sinks across the nation whose protection and restoration will maximize carbon emission reductions in our lands and waters, and improve the nation's resilience to combatting the worst effects of climate change.

The President's goal of conserving 30 percent of America's land and waters by 2030 is generating great efforts towards reducing our nation's climate footprint. In addition to clean transportation and clean energy deployment, NCS – such as the protection and restoration of our lands, waters, and wildlife – can deliver up to a third of the emission reductions needed by 2030¹ and be a crucial tool for climate mitigation and resilience.

Healthy ecosystems are natural and efficient carbon sinks, storing carbon in plants and soils and helping to lower greenhouse gasses in our atmosphere. As ecosystems are damaged due to land disturbance or modification by humans, they become less efficient at capturing and sequestering carbon. Even worse, the degradation of natural carbon sinks can turn these vital ecosystems into carbon sources. In addition to the decline in climate benefits, altered and degraded ecosystems impact plant and animal species by lowering biodiversity and impacting important ecological services, diminishing the ability to provide clean air and water, lessening the capacity of coastal zones to withstand sea-level rise, and weakening the strength of our forests to combat fires.

¹ <https://www.pnas.org/content/114/44/11645>

² <https://climatecrisis.house.gov/report>

We recognize your robust conservation efforts and commend the decade-long *America, The Beautiful* initiative spearheaded by the Department of Interior (DOI) and in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) to support locally led and voluntary conservation and restoration efforts across public, private, and Tribal lands and waters. This initiative aims to create jobs and strengthen the economy's foundation; tackle the climate and nature crises; and address inequitable access to the outdoors. We were also encouraged to see the development of the *Atlas*, a new DOI, USDA, and CEQ tool that will be used to reflect baseline information on the lands and waters that are conserved or restored. These initiatives echo the 2020 House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis report which determined that “the Department of the Interior, in consultation with other land management agencies, should undertake a landscape-level evaluation, including the ocean, of priority conservation targets and consult with and increase funding for Landscape Conservation Cooperatives”.²

We applaud these critical efforts and urge you to consider the following recommendations as you continue the development and implementation of these initiatives. First, we urge you to conduct an NCS assessment to identify key biodiversity corridors and carbon sinks across the nation that will maximize carbon emission reductions. This assessment should include natural areas and ecosystems with the highest capacity for carbon reductions through protections and restoration. The completion of such an assessment can lead to future expansion of protections for lands, waters, and oceans and allow the U.S. government to reverse decades of deforestation, bolster the capacity of nature to capture and sequester carbon, combat the worst effects of increased global temperatures, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that result from land disturbance.

Second, as a part of your whole-of-government approach to tackle the climate crisis, we urge you to include all federal agencies overseeing lands, waters, and oceans – including those whose primary mission is not land and water conservation – as a part of any interagency natural climate solution efforts. This should include agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers, which oversees blue carbon ecosystem restoration projects across the nation; the Department of Defense, which often intersects with national parks and public lands through their military bases as well as the waters in the Outer Continental Shelf for military testing; and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which coordinates federal natural disaster response, among other agencies.

As elected officials, we recognize that standing up such comprehensive efforts will require support from Congress, and with dire findings from the most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports, we know our actions must be swift. We request that you respond with information about your agencies' progress in your climate plans, provide information about current and future initiatives to develop a comprehensive federal natural climate solution strategy, and any areas where Congress can support these efforts.

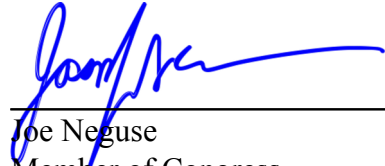
Once again, we thank you for the powerful steps you have taken, your ongoing commitment to addressing the climate crisis, and your recognition that our lands, waters, and oceans are crucial to that effort. As members of the SEEC Nature and Oceans Task Force, we stand ready to support vital natural climate solutions efforts to combat the climate crisis.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to hearing back from you.

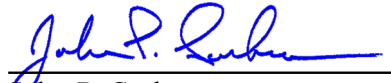
Sincerely,



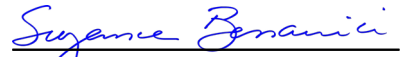
Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



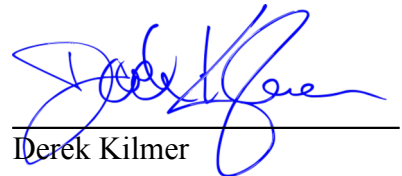
John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress



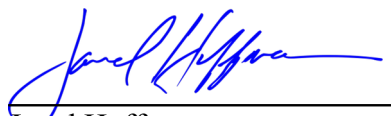
Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Alan S. Lowenthal
Member of Congress



Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

cc: Secretary Lloyd Austin, Department of Defense

Lieutenant General Scott Spellmon, Chief of Engineers and Commanding General of the
Army Corps of Engineers

Secretary Deanne Criswell, Federal Emergency Management Administration

